

## ORIGINAL ARTICLES

## Scientific and General

## CIVILIAN WARTIME PROBLEMS IN NUTRITION, FROM THE STANDPOINT OF THE PHYSICIAN\*

## A SYMPOSIUM†

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*Introduction.*—Doctors have not paid much attention to nutrition. In recent years the discovery of vitamins and, subsequently, the mass production of them, have forced upon physicians an awareness of this neglected field of medicine. Doctors usually have had less interest in health than in disease, because the "normal" is usually less stimulating than the "abnormal." In fact, nutritional-deficiency diseases have provoked greater interest among physicians than has any phase of normal nutrition.

If the medical profession is to continue to maintain its high place of leadership in society it must accept full responsibility for guiding society in the firm path of health rather than in keeping it out of the slough of disease. *Good nutrition* and *good health* are inseparable. A successful doctor should be an expert in both of them.

There is much more to the problem of optimal nutrition for all people than simple application of the principles of scientific nutrition. Problems of an agricultural and economic nature, to say nothing of that of food habits, are equally important with nutrition in attainment of "buoyant health" for everyone. Consequently, the physician must associate himself with all sorts of experts to meet satisfactorily the challenge of the great world problem of Food in either war or peace. Proof of the importance of this problem is well illustrated by the fact that the *first* United Nations Conference, with over forty nations represented, met in 1943 to discuss Food.

In an effort to bring a few of the more practical phases of this broad problem to the attention of physicians this symposium has been prepared. In it are represented a background of the importance of Food in wartime, and discussions of certain national and local

† *Explanatory Note.* Concerning Four Symposia to appear in issues of October, November, December and January.

In every war there is a tendency to neglect the health, the safety, and the nutrition of those who are behind the lines. Famine and pestilence are facts of war and can be crucial factors in victory or defeat. Our present war is so large and is lasting so long that we will need to be especially alert well beyond the cessation of hostilities.

With the desire to promote optimal health in our civilian population four symposia have been compiled. These have been gathered as follows: (1) Symposium on Disaster Relief, by Henry Gibbons, III of San Francisco, appeared in October issue; (2) Symposium on Communicable Diseases, by Edward B. Shaw of San Francisco, appeared in November number; (3) Symposium on Nutritional Problems, by Dwight L. Wilbur, of San Francisco appears in current issue; (4) Symposium on Industrial Medicine, by Rutherford T. Johnstone, of Los Angeles, will appear in January issue.

\* Foreword to a Symposium on "Civilian Wartime Problems in Nutrition: From the Standpoint of the Physician." Papers collected by Lt. Comdr. Dwight L. Wilbur, MC-V(S), U.S.N.R.

problems in nutrition, of a normal diet, and of how to attain an adequate diet with rationing of food. From the clinical standpoint, physicians will be interested in discussions of the relations of vitamins to health and disease, of the great need for, and contribution of school lunches to health, and a listing of some of the useful and practical source-material in food and nutrition.

If the symposium is helpful in the solution or other problems, or if it stimulates interest in nutrition, the essayists will have been well repaid for their efforts.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF FOOD IN WARTIME\*

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THE old saying, that the "Army travels on its stomach," applies with equal force to the civilian population in wartime. For, in modern war, the home front is as important as the battle front. The whole nation fights. Nearly every adult man and woman carries heavier burdens for longer hours at greater speed and this is a tax on body reserves, and calls for more calories and "building stones." But the irony of fate decrees,—perhaps as a reminder (to those who think) of the folly and waste of war,—that this increased need for more and better foods almost always parallels decreased food production, increased food destruction, and increased food waste by spoilage, so that all-out wars, global wars, invariably bring on malnutrition of varying kinds and degrees.

The drafting of ten million men into our Armed Forces, and the parallel increased needs of man power in the war industries interferes with food production on our farms, despite all care to the contrary. Some foods for our overseas forces have been sunk in transit, lost through enemy action on land, and spoiled in too long storage or by hot and humid climates. In countries where the actual battle fronts are located, there are more direct and extensive disruption of food production on the farms, and more direct destruction of food at hand. In addition, under conditions of modern naval warfare, excess foods produced in countries not at war (for example, Argentina) cannot be readily shipped to countries which have food shortage. In brief: war, calling for more than the peacetime calories for perhaps 75 per cent of the adult male population, creates at the same time conditions leading to decreased food production, increased food destruction, and increased food waste. Hence, food has become a mighty war weapon, food may well be the primary factor in victory as well as in defeat.

## SOME RESULTS OF FOOD SHORTAGE

When food shortage or food scarcity actually hits a population, all people are not equally affected by this calamity, despite every effort toward rationing and relatively equitable distribution of the foods available. This certainly was the experience in Europe in World War I. The actual food producers, the farmers, will usually be the best fed. There is apparently no way in keeping account of, or securing the various foods on the farms produced in excess of the ration allowed for the farm families. If it comes to a pinch in our own country in the present war, I feel sure our experience will be the same. When foods are actually off the farm—

\* One of several papers in a Symposium on "Civilian Wartime Problems in Nutrition: From the Standpoint of the Physician." Papers collected by Lt. Comdr. Dwight L. Wilbur, MC-V(S), U.S.N.R.

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